

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

1.9
F 732 Ra

LIBRARY
F. B. I.
★

ANSWERING FOOD AND DRUG QUERIES - No. 2

A RADIO TALK DELIVERED BY
W. G. CAMPBELL, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION,
OVER THE NATIONAL FARM AND HOME HOUR, FRIDAY,
OCTOBER 13, 1933, AT 1:00 P. M.,
STATION WMAL, WASHINGTON, D. C.

About three weeks ago I talked to you about some of the deadly patent medicine frauds which are being sold to the unsuspecting public today, because our present pure food and drug law does not give full authority to control them. I told you about an extract of a weed, sold at twelve dollars a pint as a cure for diabetic sufferers, and of our collection of death certificates of those poor unfortunates who believed that this worthless product would help them. I spoke of what the newspapers call the "chamber of horrors," a room here in our Food and Drug Administration in Washington, where we have collected exhibits of many of the dangerous or fraudulent foods, drugs and cosmetics, which cannot be controlled under the present National pure food and drugs act because of the loopholes in that law. I told you also of the new bill which has been drawn up by the Department of Agriculture, with the President's approval; introduced in the Senate by Senator Copeland, and which will be voted on at the next session. This new bill, known as Senate 1944, was drawn to give you, the consuming public, protection against these abuses which the present law cannot control.

Today I am going to talk with you about some of the dangerous conditions in the food field which are not adequately guarded against in the present food and drugs act, but which will be fully controlled if Senator Copeland's food and drug bill is enacted.

I have here before me an X-ray photograph of the throat and chest of a four-year old child. About one-third of the way down to the stomach is the distinct outline of a small metallic object. I do not know whether that child lived or died; whether the surgeon could remove the metallic toy from its throat, or whether the mishap was fatal. I do know that the trinket lodged in the child's throat because he ate a cheap candy in which this toy was imbedded as a prize. I have before me a number of specimens of these cheap penny candies, so dear to the heart of the average child. In each of them is imbedded a similar metallic toy. You say, why does the Government permit the sale of such a dangerous confection? A child may so easily inhale the object. At best it may result in a broken tooth; at worst in strangulation. The Food and Drug Administration was convinced that it did have authority under the present law to seize and remove from the market this kind of candy; but not long ago, when we tried to take action against a lot of such candy, a Federal judge ruled that the product was not in violation of our present law. The new food and drugs act, Senator Copeland's bill, Senate 1944, will protect your children by driving from the market dangerous candy of this kind. In the meantime, I can only say to you parents that you must be on guard to see that your child does not suffer injury from this source. This is not as it should be. The Government should give your children protection. It will hereafter if the new bill is made law.

Now I am going to talk about poisons. Surely, you say, our present pure food law keeps poisons out of food. Our present law ~~does~~ class a food as adulterated if the poison has been added, and we can prove that as a result the food may be harmful. But a poison is a poison whether it is deliberately added to the food or whether it occurs in the food through an operation of nature. Yet if it is a poison put there by nature, we are powerless to prevent its shipment and sale. In a remote section of this country there is a certain shellfish which has attained some popularity as a food. At certain times of the year this shellfish develops a powerful poison within its body. A person who eats it during the season when the poison is being generated may be killed. Fortunately the State where these shellfish grow has broader powers in food control than the Federal Government. The State authorities have very wisely prohibited the sale of this shellfish during the dangerous season. But should a bootlegger in food products evade the State supervision and send out some of this shellfish in interstate commerce, you will be surprised to know that the Food and Drug Administration has no power of control under our present law. The Copeland bill, Senate 1944, will stop this loophole. It will prohibit the sale of dangerous foods, whether the source of the danger is an added poison or a natural one.

I am not through with the subject of poisons in food. You and I don't like to be cheated by paying money for a dishonestly labeled food product, but we are much more disturbed by the thought that our food may poison us. In a later talk I am going to compare the labeling requirements of the present law and of the Copeland bill, but let me stick to poisons today.

Arsenic has been recognized for centuries as an extremely potent poison. History tells us that the professional poisoners of the Middle Ages relied on arsenic for their most spectacular results. Experts have known for years that large doses of arsenic may prove rapidly fatal, and that very minute doses may cause serious disturbances in the way of eruptions on the skin, nerve deterioration, impairment of the eyesight, loss of the hair, and many other distressing ailments. At the very beginning of this century, in the year 1901, a learned Commission appointed by the British Crown looked into a bad outbreak of arsenic poisoning in England due to the accidental presence of arsenic in beer. Thousands of people were made very ill, and not a few died. After extended study that group of experts came to very pertinent conclusions. First they recognized that arsenic is very widely distributed in nature, and that it is probably humanly impossible to keep it entirely out of the food supply. But as a result of their work they found that to guard the public health, the amount of arsenic in any item of food should always be kept below an extremely small figure; and they fixed what has become known as the international tolerance for arsenic. In round figures, this standard requires that food shall not contain more than 1.4 parts of arsenic trioxide per million parts of food. Now, with all that weight of scientific evidence it would be natural to suppose that our own Government could arbitrarily prohibit, under the present law, the shipment of any food containing arsenic in excess of this international tolerance. It happens that the farmer - particularly the fruit and vegetable grower - must use a poison to combat insect pests which, if unchecked, would kill the crops and reduce us to starvation. Arsenic has proved to be one of the most effective poisons against insects. It is perfectly proper to use it provided the grower takes care to

remove the poison before marketing his fruits and vegetables. Most growers do this. But now and then a careless or ignorant producer may forward a consignment which contains excessive arsenic. Then it is our duty under the law to seize the shipment and see that it does not reach the consumer, with disastrous results. Let me reassure you on this point. For many years the Food and Drug Administration has devoted a major part of its work to preventing the distribution of foods which contain poisonous arsenical residues. We now have the situation, so far as interstate traffic goes, well under control. Were our surveillance removed the danger would be great. Just last week, in a city in the heart of one fruit producing section, a man who marketed a food product which contained a dangerous quantity of arsenic was convicted in a Federal court. In order to prove that the product violated the law, the Government had to bring in a group of experts who could testify from their own experience that the amount of poison found in this product was highly dangerous. That cost you tax-payers a tidy sum. Of course it was paid for out of our appropriation; but the appropriation, in the long run, comes out of your pocket. Every single time we have been called upon in court to prove the danger from these amounts of arsenic in foods the Government has had to spend some thousands of dollars to bring into court expert witnesses to testify to this century-old knowledge that arsenic in the quantities found in these foods is dangerous. Why should it be necessary to go through this elaborate legal procedure to prove a thing to a jury of twelve men or women which has been known to scientific world for centuries? This new food and drugs bill introduced by Senator Copeland will make the legal procedure very much simpler, and will therefore give the consuming public much more protection than the present law.

Now, don't let me give you the idea that our present Food and drugs law - weak as it may be here and there - has been ineffective. It has been on the statute book nearly twenty-seven years. In that time, the Government has brought more than twenty-two thousand legal actions against people who have adulterated or misbranded foods or drugs. With few exceptions the Government has won. When Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, with fiery zeal, promoted the passage of the present law adulteration and misbranding were common. Now the great bulk of our food supply is honestly labeled and free from adulteration. The majority of food manufacturers are glad to obey the law. The law is made to control the minority. The principal difficulty is that times have changed in the generation since the present law was enacted. The law was adequate under conditions as they existed in 1907. What we are proposing to do with this new statute is to bring it up to date, to take the old mechanism of 1907 and gear it to the high-powered conditions of 1933 and '34. As I said in my last talk, this new food and drug bill, S. 1944, will become a law if you want it. In future programs I am going to talk about other conditions in our food and drug traffic which are not controlled by our present law, but which will be under the new bill. I am going to discuss needed control over cosmetics and over the advertising of foods, drugs, and cosmetics - matters which are well covered by the new measure. Let me say, in conclusion that if you wish additional facts about this bill you can obtain a copy of it from your Congressman or Senator. We have prepared publications giving the facts. If you want them, write the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

